

## TESTIMONY TO SENATE FISH AND GAME COMMITTEE

## SENATE BILL 151

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee my name is Chuck Rein. I ranch near Big Timber and operate a small outfitting business there as well. My family has ranched in the same location in Sweet Grass County since 1893.

I came to Helena to ask for your support of SB 151. I represent only myself here today, but I can say with confidence that many of my neighbors would endorse my comments. As landowners we would embrace a situation where sportsmen consider us to be partners instead of adversaries. Passage of SB 151 could be a catalyst for a fresh start.

I am not against the FWP commission making decisions regarding wildlife management. In fact without such a body wildlife management would be chaotic to say the least. I do oppose decisions based primarily on social and political values. The drastic reduction of archery elk permits in the hunting districts listed in SB 151 is a prime example. This decision had nothing to do with reducing the burgeoning elk population. It satisfied only one segment of Montana citizens, further driving a wedge in landowner/ sportsmen relations.

I didn't drive up here today because I have a personal reason for implementing this bill. The number of archery elk permits makes no difference to me. But the number of permits is a huge deal to a lot of small businesses, including ranchers. It is a huge deal because of it's negative impact on landowner/sportsmen relations. And it is a huge deal because Montana sportsmen lost access because of this FWP decision. These are the reasons why I am here today.

I urge you to take this opportunity to right a wrong. SB 151 allows all of us to take a step back and look at the big picture through a new lens. It is my hope that this lens will be large enough to see the needs of all parties involved.

The FWP commission must not come to the table with a politically charged social agenda. Such characteristics do not lend themselves to sound wildlife management practices. I urge you to support SB 151 and allow a new commission under a new administration to revisit this issue. It has been nothing short of disastrous for landowner/sportsmen relations.

Thank you.



## **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701  
(406) 444-3186  
FAX: 406-444-4952  
Ref: DO247-R5e-12  
September 20, 2012

Dear Landowner:

As a landowner in central or eastern Montana, you are probably aware of recent discussions on archery elk hunting opportunities and elk management. Because you may potentially be affected by regulation adjustments recently made by the Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Commission, we wanted to clarify those changes and provide background.

Montana has many special places to hunt elk, as a result of the landscape, elk numbers and, in some cases, the opportunity to take a trophy bull. These circumstances can also represent challenges relative to: equity of opportunity between archery and rifle hunters; quality of experience, with some hunters frustrated by increasing numbers of hunters and others willing to tolerate those increases in return for the opportunity to hunt each year; and difficulty managing elk numbers, in some instances the result of private lands being open for only limited or no hunter access including limited access opportunities to harvest cow elk. We appreciate that these special opportunities also result in hunter management challenges for landowners.

In a 2008 effort to address these problems in hunting districts where limited bull elk permits for the general rifle season were already in place, the FWP Commission limited the number of archery bull elk permits in the Missouri River Breaks and roughly two dozen hunting districts elsewhere in central and eastern Montana. That decision was made after considering approximately 2,000 public comments. As a result, nonresident hunter numbers have fallen in many of these HDs as archery bull elk permits are not "guaranteed" in the permit drawing. The reaction has been mixed. Some applaud the decision, while others, including some landowners and outfitters, have expressed frustration as the change impacted some local economic opportunities.

In 2012, the FWP Commission again debated and approved additional regulation adjustments. That action followed the consideration of working group recommendations and more public comment. The adjustments included increasing bull elk archery permits. That change was made partly in response to requests from landowners and outfitters with the reciprocal request from FWP and the FWP Commission that landowners would in turn allow additional public access to bull and cow elk hunters, especially during the rifle season. In particular, this increased opportunity to harvest cow elk is necessary if elk numbers are to be managed to population objectives.



The Commission also adopted the cow elk annual harvest prescription listed below in an effort to reach population objective in not more than six years. This annual prescription represents an increase in the average harvest of cow elk compared to recent years. To assist interpretation of this prescription relative to any increased access you may provide, the average estimated cow harvest from recent years is also listed along with the population objective and current population status based upon most recent survey efforts. In some cases, this first harvest prescription is less than necessary to achieve the population goal within six years, but the FWP Commission directed the department to "start small" in this effort. Proposed annual harvest prescriptions will likely increase in future years. As mentioned above, archery bull elk permit numbers were increased as an incentive to allow additional cow harvest. Again, the request is that landowners allow additional public access to bull and cow elk hunters, especially during the rifle season, in response to the increased number of archery bull elk permits. The FWP Commission asked for an annual review to monitor harvest and progression towards objectives. If there is no increased harvest, the Commission has identified reducing bull permit numbers as a potential if not likely management response.

The matter of access to private lands is clearly a landowner decision and in no way are these regulations meant to challenge that right. Authority to allocate harvest permits for game animals is assigned to the FWP Commission as is the responsibility to manage elk populations. This incentive approach is an effort by the FWP Commission to find some tolerable and effective middle ground. For 2012, FWP understands fire and drought may impact access decisions and will consider these factors in its evaluation.

If you have questions feel free to contact your closest FWP regional office or FWP wildlife sections coordinator Quentin Kujala in Helena. We're hopeful these changes are indeed tolerable and will work for you, Montana's hunters and other interests.

Sincerely,



Joe Maurier  
Director

HUNTING DISTRICT 580 south of Sweetgrass Creek POPULATION OBJECTIVE: 225  
observed elk

HUNTING DISTRICT 580 south of Sweetgrass Creek POPULATION STATUS: 972 observed  
elk

HUNTING DISTRICT 580 RECENT AVERAGE ANTLERLESS HARVEST: 173 antlerless  
elk (for all of hunting district 580; harvest for portion of hunting district 580 south of  
Sweetgrass Creek likely less than 100 antlerless elk)

HUNTING DISTRICT 580 south of Sweetgrass Creek 2012 ANTLERLESS HARVEST  
PRESCRIPTION: 110 antlerless elk (for just portion of hunting district 580 south of  
Sweetgrass Creek)